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FURNISHING OF COUNTRY HOUSES.

BY RALPH A. CRAM.

NUMBER FIVE—THE LIBRARY.

THE library is not, and never should be, a room in the least degree public in its arrangement or the character of its decoration. Here no casual callers, or idle guests are admitted, and therefore the careless, unthinking ornament and generally æsthetic style of furnishing, which would be quite appropriate in the sitting-room, is quite out of place. The gayety and frivolity of the drawing-room is never heard in the library. Society would be shamed by the still rebuke of the books. Bright, joyous colors and delicate forms are not for this room. But since thought and study have been banished to one apartment, there certainly should be gathered the priceless treasures of past times, mute teachers of long dead ages, the books, the pictures, the relics of old handiwork, and all the embodiments of the combined thoughts and deeds of men long since forgotten by the world. Plainly, no thoughtlessness of ornament can be accepted here, but quiet, dignified forms, still, thoughtful colors, and a general effect of repose and silence that might almost amount to solemnity. A library is like the forest, a student comes to it as he would seek the forest, only in the one he learns of life through the mediumship of the thoughts of others, while in the other he seeks the fountain head. A single volume of the books of such a man as Ralph Waldo Emerson is far more solemn than a vast cathedral. Would not, then, the thoughts of hundreds of like men equal the awe inspiring solitudes of a mighty forest?

Let us not speak of the library of the respectable Bourgeois, who buys his books by the yard, with the single stipulation that the binding shall match his carpet; his is no "library," it is a pitiful sham that will last so long as does money. It is to the reading and thinking rooms of the true men that the name belongs, and to this true form let us confine ourselves. It is very difficult to attempt the description of this room, so much depends on the character of the inmates. There are but the few broad rules that I have mentioned that can be applied to all libraries. Here the conventionality, which is unfortunately inseparable from the rest of the house, never intrudes, and the style of ornamentation declares as plainly the mind of the occupant as his words or deeds would do. Let us take for example the library of a thinking, earnest man, a man whose mind is not occupied with the fever of money getting, and whose spirits do not rise and fall with the stock market. Surely his library will be nearer the truth than will that of the parvenu. And now let us intrude upon his solitude and note the character of his chosen surroundings.

On leaving the great hall we pass into a wide, loggia-like ante-room, through the arcaded arches of which one catches a glimpse of winding rivers and dim, distant country. At the end of the loggia several stone steps rise to a low door, and on opening this we enter at once into the dusky, quiet and faint but fascinating odor of old books, which pervades the library. The first impression is one of an almost sombre repose. The wood finish is entirely of very dark mahogany, the deep but glowing red, being almost too worldly, is toned down and modified by the quiet, gray-greens of the carpet, the purplish-browns of the hangings, and the dull, cold blue-gray that forms the wall covering where wood is not used. These shades are, of course, of about the same degree of darkness, in order that there may be no sharp contrasts which are too unquiet to be employed here. The furniture is old oak or ebony, and the upholstery is of embossed leather or sober hued tapestry. To the left is a recess where are arranged most of the books, not in carefully locked cases with glass doors, but close at hand and inviting a taste of the priceless wisdom they so fully give. Somehow it never seems right to shut books up so jealously. It is like imprisoning birds in cages, or placing all our beautiful treasures in a parlor that is opened, perhaps, four times a year. There is no familiar companionship in imprisoned books, they cease to be friends, and become objects to be carefully guarded and hidden away from every day use. Surely, doors are not needed for protection, a strip of leather amply protects the top from the dust, and if the covers do get dull and dim, what then? Is newness and glitter a desirable feature of books? Besides, where rugs are used instead of common carpets, there will be little or no dust. Therefore, let us have our books few and near at hand; put away the invaluable volumes that no money can replace, if you like, but as for the others, let them become as familiar as possible.

And one other thing: I cannot think that a miscellaneous collection of pictures is an artistic

addition to a room. How often do we see landscapes, portraits, religious subjects, and, in fact, all kinds of pictures mixed together in the most painful manner. The eye roams from one to the other, distracted from one single impression of any particular picture by the effect of the next, which may be totally different in character. One would never think of reading a chapter of Emerson, then one of George Sand, then of Ruskin, one of Voltaire, and so on, *ad infinitum*, and then think of obtaining any lasting impression from any of them. The case is precisely the same with pictures. Two or three fine pictures are far more impressive than the picture galleries that many rooms have become since it became the fashion to patronize art. In this respect let us follow the example of the people of Pompeii and ancient Rome.

With this thought in mind, the pictures in our library are limited to four or five of unquestionable merit, and not representing a very extended range of subjects. The frames are of carved wood, and gilding is banished utterly. For what can be more cheap and tawdry than one of the elaborately moulded and gilded frames so commonly seen, and which so effectually destroy the impression of a picture.

On the left, as we enter, also stands a pipe organ, and what more fitting place could be found for this noble instrument. If it were possible to rescue the piano-forte from the degradation into which it has fallen, through association with the waltz that is jingled out by the fashionable young lady, it might also seem worthy a place here, but, fine and versatile as it is, it is too suggestive of society and fashion to share the honor of the organ, which seems the embodiment of grand thoughts, and yet, if the instrument itself could be encased in an artistic form, might not a portion of the disagreeable association be dispelled? The indescribably bad design of a piano case has doubtless much to do with the involuntary sentiment of contempt that inspires one. Some of the really fine upright pianos that are now constructed are very dignified and appropriate in design.

Most of the light enters this room through the windows on the right, and these are glazed with "cathedral glass" to a great extent. This stained glass does much towards influencing the impression of the room. The light is far from brilliant, for although a number of bright nooks and bays are desirable, yet there is no reason why some parts of the room, particularly the corners, should not be wrapped in that mysterious shadow which adds so much to its thoughtfulness. In the night one or two lamps in tinted globes, together with a few sconces, will give all the light necessary.

The dark door in the rear opens into the private study, and the spiral stairway on the left leads up to the owner's sleeping-rooms above, and also winds down to a private entrance below. Thus this suite of rooms is entirely isolated from the rest of the house, and no distracting noise can enter to disturb the quiet of this, the most sacred portion of the house.

VENEERING.

WHILE painted surfaces in imitation of inlaid work were never received with much favor, the practice of veneering, or covering an inferior wood with a very thin layer of a valuable one, was always popular, and had many arguments for its adoption aside from that of saving in money. The solid wood, oak for example, would be too heavy to be conveniently framed in the many uses it may apparently enter into by employing its veneer. A substantial, well-seasoned body of some close-grained ordinary wood, properly put together and the veneer laid on as it should be, will be less liable to shrinkage and cracking than almost any of the heavy woods.

Rosewood, walnut, ash (the burl is preferable) and maple have been a kind of stock veneer that have been used largely and most satisfactorily; the finer materials are often met, but not being adapted so universally to general use, the people are not so familiar with them.

New veneers are being constantly made, and some of them are remarkably rich in grain and figure. The ordinary yellow pine is found to be susceptible of the highest finish, and we saw, not long ago, a large piece of furniture and the surbase about a room veneered with it. The effect was agreeable and pleasing.

Poplar has recently had qualities discovered in it that make it suitable for artistic work, and Magnolia and Sweet Bay are coming into demand. Mr. Hough, in a recent article in THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER, suggested the possibility of training our trees so that they may present a showy and a novel grain in veneer.

Of recent years inlaid veneer or marquetry has attained a remarkable position, and may be

said now to have established itself as a permanency in the cabinet work of the age. A quick way of making this inlaid work that has been employed in the United States for some time, is to arrange the pieces of veneer alternately—walnut and maple, for instance—and with a very fine marquetry saw cut the pattern through all the pieces as they lie piled upon each other, thus arranged according to the kind of wood. When this is done the cabinet-maker has a quantity of veneers before him of various woods with the pattern cut out of each, and on the other hand a quantity of fragile patterns in veneer which correspond with the cuttings in the larger pieces. All that is now necessary to be done is to set the maple pattern in the walnut veneer, or *vice versa*, and the marquetry is complete. This has the double advantage of cheapness and durability, and the process is one that has the merit of allowing rapid work, and usually of a satisfactory character.

CANVAS AS A DECORATIVE WALL COVERING.

BY R. A. F., ARCHITECT.

[From *The Plumber and Decorator*, London].

OUR versatile neighbors, the French, alive to everything novel, and with a perceptive genius for the adoption of all meritorious ideas, have lately turned their attention to the use of canvas, painted or distempered, as a decorative covering for walls; and we without the least loss of national dignity, may, on our part, adopt the same suggestion, and make it a most valuable supplement to existing methods in this country.

The Parisian theory for its use is to produce imitations of Gobelins and Flemish tapestry, and run it in the market as a cheap substitute for those glorious products of the loom, and we cannot deny that this, even at the expense of truth, is a gain to decorative art. But the reasons for which rough canvas should be most acceptable as a decorative medium, is the granulated surface which lends that quality for giving richness and depth to the color applied, so well known and appreciated by the water-color artist when he uses rough hand-made paper.

We are unable to offer reliable data as to cost of production, so little having been done in this country, but quoting Violet le Duc, painted canvas hangings do not cost much more than wall papers and much less than upholstery hangings, chintz excepted. They are substantial in appearance, and in reality, and would harmonize excellently with joinery work in natural woods and for panels, etc.

In proof of its durability, some are to be seen at Rheims, dating from the 15th century, and which are perfectly well preserved.

Instead of copying ancient tapestry or slavishly working in any traditionary groove for the production of painted canvas work, natural history, and plant subjects treated conventionally, somewhat in the spirit of Japanese art, would more readily lend itself to the exigencies of modern constructive design, and give a fine field for broad artistic manipulation. If high art is inadmissible on the score of cost or the scarcity of art workmen, then good effects can be had by the clever use of the stencil.

The manner of working on cloth as described by Violet le Duc is as follows, but the intelligent practical decorator may possibly invent a method of his own: Canvas cloths are taken either crosswoven or twilled, of coarse texture, manufactured for the purpose, rather like the cloths of which sacks are made. These cloths are stretched on a floor with tacks, then they are given them a coating of leather size to which is added a very little whitening, when this coat is dry they proceed to paint them in distempers, as for theatre decorations. On this ground anything we choose can be painted—diagrams which do not cost much as we stencil them, or ornaments, landscapes, flowers, and even figures. The cost of the material is trifling, and the value of the hangings depends on the artist's work. When dry, the cloths can be rolled up and sent anywhere at small expense; then on the spot they are stretched again on very thin frames called tapestry stretchers. There is therefore a space between the wall and the hanging, and this is so much more convenient, as if the rooms are not warmed in winter and if damp is feared the cloth can be taken down, rolled up, and put in a dry place to be replaced in spring as we do with tapestry.

Window Shades of a new description have been introduced into the Queen's apartments at Balmoral, and are likely to become generally popular. The shade is of open-work embroidery upon fine linen, the interstices being cut away, and is lined with colored silk, which shows through the embroidery. The effect is very handsome, and this style of shade is a decided improvement upon those of black and white linen.

Cards indicating guests' seats at dinner, are gotten up bearing special designs for the particular person for whom they are intended. Witty suggestions and pleasant allusions to well-known peculiarities will create much amusement and furnish topics for conversation—about the only thing wanting at fashionable banquets.

Polished Brass Plaques, painted in oil, although not new, are pleasing and pretty.